

Sentence-Composing Tools: Opening Adjective

DEFINITION:

An adjective at the opening of a sentence. An adjective is any descriptive word that can fit into this blank: *Sam is a _____ student.*

Here are a few possibilities to describe the student: *happy, sad, angry, glad, smart, sneaky, polite, disruptive*, etc. Jot down ten more.

An opening adjective may be a single word or the first word in an adjective phrase. An adjective phrase begins with an adjective and then continues the description. Here are examples: *happy to graduate, sad because her pet died, angry at not getting the job, glad about winning the spelling bee, smart as Einstein, sneaky at times, polite with both elders and children, disruptive because he was beside his best friend*, etc. A comma follows an opening adjective, whether a single word or a phrase.

Sentences can contain single or multiple opening adjectives.

Single opening adjective: **Powerless**, we witness the sacking of our launch.

Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*

Multiple opening adjectives: **Bloodthirsty** and **brutal**, the giants brought themselves to the point of extinction by warring amongst themselves during the last century.

Armstrong Sperry, *Call it Courage*

Opening adjective phrases: **Numb of all feeling, empty as a shell**, still he clung to life, and the hours droned by.

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

PRACTICE 1: MATCHING

Match the opening adjectives with the sentences. Write out each sentence, inserting and underlining the opening adjectives.

Sentences:

1. ^, I wanted to run away and be gone from this strange place.
Keith Donahue, *The Stolen Child*
2. ^, I felt behind me, my hand pleading for that rifle.
Theodore Waldeck, "Certain, Sudden Death"
3. ^, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds, but dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly.
George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"
4. ^, he rocked his own body back and forth, breathing deeply to release the remembered pain.
Lois Lowry, *The Giver*
5. ^, he came to our door and eased his heavy pack and asked for refreshment, and Devola brought him a pail of water from our spring.
Bill and Vera Cleaver, *Where the Lilies Bloom*

Opening Adjectives:

- a. Alive
- b. Hot and dusty and over-wearied
- c. Lonesome
- d. Able to move now
- e. Frantic, never turning my head--because the water buffalo had started his charge

PRACTICE 2: UNSCRAMBLING TO IMITATE

In the model and the scrambled list, identify the opening adjective. Next, unscramble and write out the sentence parts to imitate the model. Finally, write your own imitation of the model and identify the opening adjective.

MODEL: Speechless, Bryson scanned the small living room, frantically.
Robert Ludlum, *The Prometheus Deception*

- a. hopefully
- b. spotted the soft inviting sofa
- c. Kendra
- d. uncomfortable

PRACTICE 3: COMBINING TO IMITATE

In the model, identify the opening adjectives. Next, combine the list of sentences to imitate the model. Finally, write your own imitation of the model and identify any opening adjectives.

MODEL: Dark, velvety, the beauty of his mustache was enhanced by his strong clean-shaven chin.
Tony Morrison, *Beloved*

- a. His cautionary steps were slow.
- b. His cautionary steps were weary.
- c. His cautionary steps were caused by something.
- d. The cause was the surrounding overexcited horses.

PRACTICE 4: IMITATING

Identify the opening adjectives in the models and sample imitations. Then write an imitation of each model sentence, one sentence part at a time. Read one of your imitations to see if your classmates can guess which model you imitated.

Models:

- 1. Wordless, we split up.
Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*

Sample: Wet, the napkin fell apart.

- 2. Cold, dark, and windowless, it stretched the length of the house.
Jessamyn West, "The Child's Day"

Sample: Hot, humid, and muggy, the weather exhausted the stamina of the bikers.

- 3. Afraid that we might hunt for a cheaper apartment for the next two weeks and find nothing better than this one, we took it.
Wallace Stegner, *Crossing to Safety*

Sample: Happy that we would escape to a lovely beach for the upcoming one month and have nothing but good times, we left home.

PRACTICE 5: EXPANDING

The opening adjectives are omitted at the caret mark (^) in the following sentences. For each caret, add an opening adjective or adjective phrase, blending your content and style with the rest of the sentence.

1. ^, I began climbing the ladder's rungs, slightly reassured by having Finny right behind me.
John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*
2. ^ and ^, he wandered about the many tents, only to find that one place was as cold as another.
Jack Londong, "To Build a Fire"
3. ^ and ^, my limited reading helped me to know something of a world beyond the four walls of my study.
Christy Brown, *My Left Foot*